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ABSTRACT

This book challenges all Catholic educators to plan for the future. The 19 essays, written by principals of Catholic elementary/middle schools, vary in their message, but they all share a vision for the future of Catholic schools. The volume opens with an essay that explains how a school must establish its values before it can determine it vision for the future. The booklet addresses how everyone is invited to participate in a Catholic education, and it offers several poetical versions of the Catholic school of the future. It asserts that Catholic school teachers must be paid a fair, just wage and that the strength of Catholic education is its partnerships with the church and with the community. It explores what Catholic schools will look like in the year 2020 and encourages principals to respond to various challenges in the same way that Jesus would have responded. The essays discuss chronological age versus readiness age, how Catholic schools can provide help to all students, various ideas of what Catholic schools will look like in the future, the family's future in Catholic schools, the challenge of stewardship, and restructuring Catholic schools for the 21st century. The book is intended to promote reflection and to stimulate dialogue. (RJM)

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American Catholic Schools for the 21st Century:

Reflections on the Future of American Catholic Elementary Schools

ED 430 313

Volume 2

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Department of Elementary Schools
National Catholic Educational Association

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American Catholic Schools for the 21st Century:

Reflections on the Future of American Catholic Elementary Schools

Volume 2

Robert J. Kealey, Ed.D., Editor
Executive Director
Department of Elementary Schools

National Catholic Educational Association
Washington, D.C.

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DEDICATION

The members of the National Catholic Educational Association Department of Elementary Schools Executive Committee dedicate this work to

all the principals of Catholic elementary schools who have gone before them.

American Catholic elementary schools have a proud history of over two centuries of academic excellence and solid religious formation. The principals of these schools led their faculties to educate a poor immigrant population into becoming one of the best-educated groups in the United States today. These same educators instilled in their students a love for Christ and his Church, which continues today.

American Catholic school principals of the 21st century stand on the shoulders of those who went before them and promise them that they will keep the priceless jewel in the crown of the American Catholic Church shining brightly.

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PREFACE

This small book continues the dialogue begun a year ago in Volume 1. The goal of this dialogue remains the same as stated in the Preface on page 1 of the first volume in this series:

> This book is a call to action for all Catholic elementary schools. It challenges and invites all Catholic educators to plan for the future. . . . The members of the NCEA Department of Elementary Schools Executive Committee who wrote these reflections wanted to start a conversation among themselves and all their membership. This conversation focuses on changes that need to take place to move our schools into the new age. The members of the committee are certain that only by planning for the future can we create the future that we desire.

The 19 essays in this book were written by principals of Catholic elementary/middle schools. All but two of the writers were members of the 1997 National Catholic Elementary/Middle School Principals Academy. The essays, both in form and in content, are as varied as Catholic education itself, but they all share a vision for the future of Catholic schools. Each writer would admit that his or her vision is not complete. By putting all the pieces together, however, a pattern begins to emerge.

This is not a book that is to be read through at one sitting. It is a book for reflection, to stimulate dialogue among and between different readers. While educators need to read and ponder these essays, members of school boards, heads of home and school associations, clergy, and other school leaders who are concerned with planning the future of the school need their own copy so they can question and annotate as they reflect on the various views. This is not a book of ready-made solutions; the solutions will come from the individual planning process of each school.

The Department of Elementary Schools expresses its gratitude to the authors for their willingness to share their visions with others. It also expresses its gratitude to members of the NCEA staff: Sister Ann Sciannella, SND, for preparing the manuscript; Tara McCallum, for proofreading and editing the text; and Tia Gray, for designing the layout of the book.

The department offers this book to its members with the hope that it will encourage courageous and visionary planning so our students will continue to be a gift to the nation and the Church.

PREFACE

Feast of St. John, Apostle, Evangelist and Teacher, 1997

Kieran Hartigan, RSM
President

Robert J. Kealey, Ed.D.
Executive Director

Department of Elementary Schools
National Catholic Educational Association

FROM VALUES TO VISION

The question is not, "What will Catholic schools of the 21st century look like?" The question is, "What *should* they look like?" What do we *want* them to look like? Let us not predict the future; let us design it.

How do we form this vision? We build and expand our programs to offer services that express and fulfill our values. These values and beliefs have been consistently professed in our philosophies and mission statements. Let us consider some of these fundamental values and, from them, determine how we want to *add to the value of the service* our schools provide.

Here I present five common values and, through them, identify five specific ways in which Catholic schools of the 21st century can change to improve upon the impressive service that we have developed in this century.

Value 1: Parents are the primary educators of their children.

If this is true, what is our obligation to offer help to parents who seek it? How many of our parents might seek such help? Consider some facts from *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (Richard J. Herrnstein & Charles Murray, 1994):

1. Since colleges and universities offer the greatest opportunities for participating in child development courses of any kind, it seems logical to assume that the more parents who have attended college, the better. So, who have attended? The percentage of the U.S. population who have attended college is lower than you would expect. In 1980, a person with average intelligence had about a 30 percent probability of entering college and less than a 20 percent probability of actually completing a four-year program. In 1990, about 30 percent of the 23-year-olds earned a B.A. or B.S. degree. Of all those who entered college, how many actually take any courses in any kind of developmental behavior that might aid them in raising children? Fewer, to be sure. As college becomes more expensive and our finances become more strained, there is no reason why this trend should change. In fact, it probably will get worse.
2. The likelihood of being born and raised in a single-parent family is growing. In 1991, the probability of mothers of average age and intelligence having children out of wedlock ranged from 10 to 51 percent depending on ethnicity. Are these figures constant over time? No, they are increasing. Within one ethnic group, the percentage of

children born to a single mother has risen 250 percent since 1960. We should assume that many children in our schools will have single parents. How can we make our schools more affordable for them, and how much help will they need in parenting their children?

3. In addition, it is important to note that the study revealed that in 1992, the number of children born to women of ages 35 to 44 decreased as education increased. In fact, there were 71 percent more births among women who dropped out of high school. The children born in 1992 are now entering preschool and kindergarten. The preceding facts suggest that a large number of these children have a strong probability of having mothers who are not married and have not attended college. They may need our help.

Vision 1: Our 21st-century Catholic schools must offer more education to parents.

Value 2: Teach the whole child.

How many principals this year will hear at least one parent say, "When will we begin a music or art program? For decades Catholic schools have offered an excellent education in the core academic subjects, but for too long, they have neglected music and the arts. If all talents and skills are gifts from God, then we do a disservice to children by not exploring these gifts. A balanced curriculum intended to teach the whole child must include the arts.

Vision 2: Our 21st-century Catholic schools must implement a comprehensive curriculum in the visual and performing arts.

Value 3: Learning is unique to every child.

How many of us can deny that many of our students still receive a majority of their learning through lecture? An impressive body of research has established that all people learn in a variety of ways. Knowing this, are we not morally bound to *teach* in a variety of ways, to address the learning styles of all students? The research on multiple intelligences, the various learning theories, and models for interdisciplinary instruction (which often

help teachers combine multiple intelligence and learning theories) must become the norm and not the exception. Also, each year more is added to the curriculum. In this educator's opinion, it is simply not possible to address sufficiently all the skills and knowledge we plan for children to develop without integrating the disciplines.

Vision 3: Teachers will teach students in a variety of ways using the theory of multiple intelligences and will make every effort to integrate disciplines.

Value 4: Every child can learn.

How many of our schools can serve students with special needs? Until we do, we really aren't "open to all," are we? I applaud Elena Casariego Hines of Dallas, Texas, in her 1996 essay "A Dream That Cannot Be Deferred" for her comments regarding children with special needs, both the challenged and the gifted. How much longer can se say, "We don't have the resources" to excuse our inability to serve these children and their families? Are parents of children with special needs also the primary educators of their children? In a best-case world, would we serve them? Yes, we would. Let's build that best-case world. Start planning.

Vision 4: Our 21st-century Catholic schools must provide services to students with special needs.

Value 5: The school is Catholic, i.e., able to educate all children who want a Catholic education.

Is a school Catholic, universally inviting everyone? Are admission decisions hampered by budgetary constraints? For our schools to be truly Catholic, open to all, we must be able to accept *all* children. Funding our schools primarily through tuition, as most of us currently do, has prevented this. Until this system changes, we not only will remain inaccessible to some families, but many of the improvements we seek will likewise remain beyond our reach. Pastors and principals should strongly recommend that school boards start to build a development plan, which will seek to find alternative means of funding education, their first and greatest concern.

Vision 5: Our 21st-century Catholic schools must make the development of alternative funding a priority.

In summary, our Catholic schools must grow and change, and the direction for that growth is clearly defined by our values. If we seek to continue to offer education that recognizes parents as the primary educators of their children, teaches the whole child, offers learning unique to every child, believes that every child can learn, and is Catholic—that is, the school does not deny entrance to children for lack of finances—then we must challenge ourselves to transform these values more fully into a reality for our children. To do that, our 21st-century Catholic schools must—

1. Offer more education to parents
2. Focus on interdisciplinary instruction
3. Provide services to students with special needs
4. Make a priority the development plan, which seeks alternative funding for schools

This essay was submitted by Christopher Maricle, M.A., principal, Holy Spirit School, Fremont, California.

EVERYONE IS INVITED TO THE TABLE

"When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?' When Jesus heard this, he replied, 'It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. Go and learn the meaning of these words: "What I want is mercy, not sacrifice."' And, indeed, I did not come to call the virtuous, but sinners" (Matt 9:11-13).

The American Catholic schools for the 21st century must fully embrace the charge from Jesus that everyone be invited to the table.

This was an integral part of the mission of the first American Catholic schools, parish schools simply serving the children of the parish. The Catholic school of today, however, seems more concerned about academic excellence than its mission of mercy. The Catholic school is marketed as a place where test scores are higher and more graduates go to college. The simple lessons of Jesus seem lost in our competitive culture.

The number of children at risk is growing in our society. These children must be a priority for us in the 21st century. The Catholic school could be a place where these children receive not only an appropriate education but the nurturing and spiritual guidance that they desperately need.

Meeting the needs of these children will require a cooperative rather than a competitive approach with other educational institutions. Children with special needs often require a variety of resources. We should be working with families to identify and provide all of the community resources required to meet a child's needs.

I believe this is the challenge of the 21st century for the American Catholic school: to open its doors to all children. Meeting this challenge will require a mission of mercy, as we welcome children who are at risk and teach the others what it means to live the Gospel.

This essay was submitted by Steve Cederborg, director of development at the Hanna Boys Center in the Archdiocese of San Francisco.

MY VISION OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS OF THE FUTURE

A home
A heart
Jesus
Students, parents, teachers working together.

Listening
Stretching
Grasping
For truths to be made known.

Happy
Alert
Thrilled
To be learning in the present and for the future.

Slowly
Patiently
Anxiously
Waiting for Jesus' message to burst forth.

White
Black
Yellow or red
We are colorblind.

One
Holy
Catholic and apostolic
These are the marks our schools bear.

Catholics
Protestants
Searchers
Respecting others' beliefs.

Rich
Poor
Middle-class
Economic barriers need to be crossed.

MY VISION OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS OF THE FUTURE

Blackboards
Laptops
Media
Help deliver the curriculum.

Nonviolent
Earth-conscious
Drug-free.

2000
2013
2050
Each year a fresh beginning, a brand new start.

Because we have barriers to tear down and good news to spread
Leaders to form and values to impart
Knowledge to share and individuals to love:
Catholic schools for the 21st century—our hope for the future.

Yes, I believe.

This poem was submitted by Sister Kathy Avery, OSM, principal of St. Francis of Assisi School, Pikeville, Kentucky.

CATHOLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS— A FAIR, JUST WAGE

Catholic schools were built with the sweat and hard work of an immigrant church. Priests and sisters gave their life's efforts to found and staff the schools. The education provided in these schools gave the students and their families the knowledge to survive and thrive in the culture of our nation.

Today, the diminishing number of religious has required that lay Catholics accept the role of religious educators. The move has been healthy for lay teachers, as they have studied their faith in order to be able to teach it well. The early legacy of minimum wages for the priests and religious, however, has remained. There has been value in the reduced wages, since those who choose to teach in a Catholic school do it as a ministry. This gift of service often attracts individuals who will truly make a difference in the lives of children.

Jesus told us, however, that "the worker is worthy of his wage." We see the results of low wages given to the sisters as we see them reaching retirement age with inadequate retirement income to support their growing healthcare needs. These teachers who taught the students about justice and fairness did not demand it for themselves during their years as wage earners.

As Catholic Christians we need to provide a fair, just wage to our employees. If we cannot provide wages that match the public sector, we need to provide at least a minimum wage and benefits of 80 percent of the amount the local school district offers. Catholic teachers live in the same communities as public school teachers; they pay the same price for groceries and shoes. It is not fair or just to take advantage of the good will of our Catholic school staff and force them into substandard living situations.

Low wages often spell the downfall of a school. Schools primarily exist on the good reputation of the faculty and staff. Schools with wages that are too low often cannot attract or retain the caliber of employee that will attract new families to the school. Word of mouth is the best marketing tool. The worth of an excellent staff cannot be overestimated.

School boards and finance committees need to set goals for achieving at least an 80 percent parity with their local school districts. Adopting a three-, four-, or five-year plan for achieving these goals will make the plan easier for patrons and supporters of the schools.

Our Catholic people need to be challenged to support their parishes and schools. We have schools to brag about. Catholic schools consistently

have outstanding test scores, excellent graduation rates, and service- and value-oriented education, and the students become parishioners who are active and provide strong financial support. Catholic teachers and staff deserve wages that are fair and just.

This essay was submitted by Marcia S. Ney, principal of St. Stanislaus Tri-Parish School, Lewiston, Idaho.

WHAT IS A DIDGERIDOO?

In the outback of Australia, one can trace the history of the didgeridoo. Used by the aborigines, it is a musical instrument that has created a balance of harmony in nature. It is said that the mysterious tremors of the didgeridoo create an echo of the human spirit. While certain basic skills are needed to produce sounds on this ancient instrument made of kiln-dried bamboo, there are no limits to the variety of sounds and rhythms that can be explored with it. Each didgeridoo is hand painted by an artist into an intricate work of art.

We are called in our ministry of education to create intricate works of art. As we go forward into the 21st century, there are certain basic skills our students and teachers must perform to produce echoes of the human spirit. We have found that the NCEA program Lighting New Fires is a challenge to us. As we study the heritage of our Catholic schools and Catholic community, we sense the harmony and traditions of those who came before us.

We are a regional school in an urban Catholic community; it is important for us to study our heritage and understand why certain decisions were made in the past. Today it is of extreme importance that as a Catholic community, we look with vision to the next century and continue with our mission to provide a Catholic education for every young person in our parishes. We want our students to be lifelong learners in the Catholic tradition of excellence.

Our Catholic school, our faith community, are called to be family. Our teachers reach out to each other, to the families, and most importantly, to the children entrusted to our care. We live the Scriptures that we have so often read and have had demonstrated to us over the years of our formation.

In our diverse society, we are preparing for the future. Technology is a tool that has great potential to assist us in communicating with the diverse families that we are called to serve. We rely on our faith community to assist in the area of language as many newcomers from other lands enter our schools. A partnership with business is of importance as we prepare these young people as well as all students for the future.

An opportunity was given to my son to see 20 of our astronauts assembled on the football field at Purdue University. My son, standing close to Neil Armstrong, could reach out and touch the famous astronaut. While fueling my car in South Daytona Shores one morning, I looked at the sky to see the space shuttle lift off into the clouds above, and I understood my

son's awe of the astronauts and their challenge to others to learn and stretch to the limits of harmony with our Creator.

The ability to express oneself on the "didge" is a primary reason why this instrument is finding new popularity among professional musicians as well as novices. The possibilities are unlimited, as are the possibilities for the future of Catholic education. In our urban environment, it takes both the young and their mentors to continue in a spirit of harmony with the two parishes, working together to ensure the future of Catholic education. Leadership is of the utmost importance. Pastors and principals working together will guide others on this journey to the new millennium. As we prepare for the future, it is important that we never lose sight of today. As we prepare for God's kingdom, we never know when we will be called.

This essay was submitted by Cecilia A. Smith, former principal of Sts. Joan of Arc and Patrick School in Kokomo, Indiana. Several months after she wrote this essay, Mrs. Smith died in a tragic car accident.

PARTNERS IN LEARNING

The future of Catholic education is deeply rooted in partnership. Teachers and children need to form a connection that enables the children to discover their inner resources that will make a difference in the real world. Teachers are called to join the children in discovering creative ways to learn how to learn.

The classroom needs to be a place where the teacher and children gather to set goals and explore ways to solve problems. In this environment, the teacher and students assume the role of both teacher and learner. The more mutual the exchange, the more successful will be the outcome.

We need to make plans to ensure that all the resources existing in the heart and mind of the children are discovered and developed as they journey through our schools. All the knowledge that is shared in the schools needs to be brought to the next level, which is the level of understanding. The transition from knowledge to understanding becomes possible when the teachers and students share and discover new opportunities for learning. Partnering in education offers tremendous opportunities for growth in, and a love of, learning.

This essay was submitted by Sister Colleen Dauerbach, SSJ, principal of Holy Rosary School in Claymont, Delaware.

A TRUTH TALE: CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN 2020

And it came to pass that the years went by, and as the dawn of the 21st century drew near, there began among the people much speculation about the future of the world.

Some looked to the future with dread, constantly dreaming of the past and wanting to go back to it, while others were consumed with fear and uncertainty. Throughout the land, the mood was dark and foreboding as the 21st century drew near.

During this time, in a small town in Northern California, things were very different. In Campbell, California, at a school called St. Lucy, parents and children looked forward to the new millennium and all the possibilities that the 21st century had to offer, for at St. Lucy Parish School, parents, teachers, and students had worked together for years to plan for the changes that would come. They had promoted strong family spirit in the midst of the fast-paced Silicon Valley. They had realized that Campbell, though surrounded by high-income areas, still had managed to serve the needs of a diverse economic population, and for 44 years St. Lucy School had maintained a high profile in this local community. Here, teachers, parents, and students could pursue the educational mission of the Church in proclaiming the message of the Gospel, fostering the development of community, serving those in need, and coming together in celebration and worship.

For several years, this school community had looked to the future and had realized that it was possible to keep the school educationally and technologically current while maintaining the highest spiritual and academic standards. Years ago, when they had asked, "What must be done to thrive in the 21st century?" they had found the answer in the heart of the school: parents and teachers working together to deepen the parish/school ties, respond to the needs of the poor, and establish long-range plans for the growth of the school's educational mission. This school community had discovered that to continue into the future, it was essential for the school to be an integral part of the parish. With strong support of the pastor and with the parish-school relationship clearly stated in the philosophy, this partnership had flourished. Since St. Lucy Parish School was a microcosm of society, there was also a place for the poor as well as those who could afford the cost of Catholic education. A viable development program, adequate scholarship money, and an endowment fund had been established to ensure the fiscal stability of the school and its families. At St. Lucy, they knew that the most successful marketing technique was seeing students with a positive attitude, active in the school, parish, and local community.

So, in the small community of St. Lucy School, the parents, teachers, and students did not fear the future as others did, for they knew that their strong roots and careful future planning would ensure growth in the 21st century. They recalled that St. Julie Billiart, founder of the Sisters of Notre Dame, frequently had said, "Like the sunflower, we turn toward God, source of our light." With St. Lucy as the patroness of light, the families of St. Lucy Parish School were secure in knowing that they would enter the 21st century following God's lighted path.

This essay was submitted by Sister Jolene M. Schmitz, CHS, principal of St. Lucy Parish School, Campbell, California.

COMMUNITY, COMMUNITY, COMMUNITY

Education, schools in particular, has become many things to many people and even has stretched to bounds and obligations that the most optimistic of educators would find confining, or limiting at best. The many obligations may come in the guise of providing counseling, offering parenting classes, providing meals, handling substance abuse of all varieties, dealing with harassment, accommodating diversity and, while you're at it, trying to increase achievement in any and all curricular areas.

Referring back to the initial sentence in this essay, schools must be all things to all people and are taking on more responsibilities than ever before. Much like our cities and municipalities, the schools are (whether they choose to be or not) the focal point of the community. It is the schools that are to provide the children, parents, and other members of society with a point or area of support, hope for the future, and a safe haven. The future of our democracy may hinge on schools assuming a greater role in the molding of our youth.

This past July, while attending the Nova Southeastern University's Summer Institute for Educational Leaders, the focus was very striking to me. I learned that schools cannot do everything in isolation, nor should this be the expectation. Schools should reach out and accept all children and welcome them, along with the accompanying ills, deficiencies, and societal problems they represent. Schools should be proactive in their pursuit of assisting the citizenry and providing for it those services in which governments have fallen short. Educators and guests gathered and displayed for each other, during this summer institute, the various and unique methods whereby schools become the community.

Speakers, such as former New York Governor Mario Cuomo, encouraged and inspired many to "educate, educate, educate." This means to expand and increase offerings and services and, more importantly, to accommodate the diverse needs of today's child. Mr. Cuomo had every educator bursting with pride because of the importance of his or her chosen profession.

Carla Hawkins, a Chicago principal, literally brought the school to the people. In order to increase attendance in her school, she marched her teachers through the streets of the projects, gathering the students and bringing them to school. Among her many accomplishments, Ms. Hawkins gained a reputation for overcoming tremendous odds and building her school into a center of the community.

COMMUNITY, COMMUNITY, COMMUNITY

Community, community, community—the word, the concept began to take on many images, became all-encompassing with many components. All the components have to work together to achieve the desired success. After some thought, it occurred to me that our school, St. Theresa, may reflect a very clear image of community. Our school is a place where teachers, students, especially parents, and any other stakeholders work together for a common cause—an excellent educational experience for our children.

What sets our concept of community apart from that of other educational institutions is our quest to provide for the mental, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being of the child. Except for the spiritual, most schools do a very good job in all areas—we certainly like to believe that—but we must be outstanding when guiding and molding the spiritual aspect of our children. It is our hope and the hope of our parents to instill a value system that our students will embrace and carry throughout their lives, no matter what career path is chosen. The children of St. Theresa School are fortunate to receive an outstanding Catholic education that encourages and supports high academic achievement, a sound value system, and a prayerful relationship with God that fosters sharing and living the good news of the Gospel messages.

We cannot do all this alone, however. A concerted effort by our total community is what allows us to look toward the future with optimism. Today we are preparing tomorrow's church and state leaders. We can accomplish this wonderful task if we have the support and assistance of all committed to these common goals. It takes a lot of hard work and patience—and prayers can't hurt.

This essay was submitted by Richard A. Facciolo, principal of St. Theresa School, Palm Springs, California.

HOW DO YOU DO THAT THING YOU DO?

I recently read an article in our local newspaper about Jesus as CEO and Jesus in the boardroom. The author mentioned that he did not think any CEO's wore the bracelet with *WWJD?* inscribed on it. It seems that the author raised the question based on the popular bracelet slogan "What would Jesus do?" and applied it to running large corporations.

I thought I would apply that same thought process to the school setting. How about "Jesus as an educational administrator" and "Jesus at the school board meeting"? Strap on your "What Would Jesus Do?" bracelet and let us take a walk through the halls of our Catholic schools.

Role model, healer, teacher, storyteller, strategic planner, and peacemaker. Yes, we administrators have a lot in common with Jesus. If we can remind ourselves of that every morning before we get out of bed, maybe it can help put a positive spin on our busy days and perhaps inspire us when confronted with our many challenges.

A teacher is having a difficult morning. Nothing is working. She is getting that backed-into-the-corner look.

WWJD?

A meeting between you and an angry parent reveals a very sad and emotional family situation—perhaps this explains a lot about the parent's anger and about the parent's child, if you just listen.

WWJD?

Two students are sent to the principal's office for misbehaving in the boys' bathroom. . . . (Use your imagination.)

WWJD?

You need to answer some budget concerns at a school board meeting. Finding the right words and phrases and anticipating some heavy-duty questions have you dreading this meeting.

WWJD?

A second-grade artist brings you a colorful drawing of you with the words "I luv my princabell" carefully crayoned along the bottom of the paper.

WWJD?

HOW DO YOU DO THAT THING YOU DO?

Your desk looks like a disaster area, with the must-do-today pile and the must-do-this-week pile staring at you, not to mention all the Post-it Notes lined up in the middle of everything.

WWJD?

You load the last of five buses at the end of "their" day. You smile, wave, and head back into the building to continue your day.

What would *Jesus* do? What would *you* do?

This essay was submitted by Judi Koepnick, principal of Immaculate Heart of Mary School, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

CHRONOLOGICAL AGE VERSUS READINESS AGE

Schools for the next generation may look and operate differently, but there will also be similarities to today's schools. School buildings, teachers, students, homework assignments, and reports of student progress are essential elements that will stay. Required days of attendance, delivery of instruction, methods for assessing student progress, and modes of interaction between students and teachers and between students and other students may be quite different from the way we operate today. Changes in family life that affect the needs of parents and students, as well as advances in technology that have opened new avenues for acquiring information, will impact the schools of the future.

With an increase in single parenthood and in two-parent families that have both parents working outside the home, there is an increase in the number of children enrolled in day care centers and preschool programs. Full-day kindergarten programs are more common. Children come to first grade with a wealth of several years of educational experiences, sometimes starting at age two and a half. So when does "school" actually begin?

It seems that grade levels defined primarily by chronological age are not always the most appropriate means for determining when a child should start school or when parents may need to place their children in a structured child-care/educational setting. At whatever age children enter these programs, their developmental levels should be assessed in a nonthreatening, helpful manner similar to the suggestions of the Early Prevention of School Failure Assessment Program. Child-care workers or teachers should begin moving children through the educational process as the children are ready to participate in developmentally appropriate activities. Movement through the learning stages should be based on mastery of skills rather than on grade levels based on age. Progress through the curriculum would be recorded on report cards based on skills mastery, portfolios (recorded on CD), and other assessment methods that would document evidence of acquired information with the ability to apply what has been learned. Letter grades (A, B, C, etc.) would become irrelevant.

In such a system, teachers would become facilitators in the learning process rather than lecturers. Computers available to all students, while at school and at home, with Internet access and e-mail capabilities would change the method of instruction dramatically. Students would be able to move through instructional computer programs (with as much repetition as would be needed) at their own pace and would be guided by the teacher through lessons for applying knowledge and higher-order thinking skills.

Cooperative research and learning projects would include students communicating with students in other schools across the country, all over the world, or in their neighborhood as they work on assignments.

The culmination of these projects would be an individual assessment of knowledge and skills mastery as well as the collection of products appropriate for individual portfolios. Parents would be able to access information from the teacher's computer about the directions and details of assignments their children are working on, the school's calendar of events, and newsletter information.

With on-line access and the elimination of chronological-age grade levels, students could continue to practice and learn new skills year-round (even if the school building and school buses only operated during the established nine-month school year). Eventually, the school-year concept might evaporate, as students and parents saw progress based on work and accomplishments rather than on time segments and age. A sense of personal control over advancement through the curriculum might motivate students to want to continue to learn on more than the annual required number of school days as determined by their state. If parents planned a family vacation at any time during the school year, the children would not miss the lessons the teacher covered on those days. When returning to school, the students would simply pick up where they left off, or they might choose to continue the school work on a personal, portable computer during some of their vacation time.

New technology continues to arrive on the scene at mind-boggling rates. Meeting the needs of students and their many family situations seems overwhelming to most teachers today. Teaching and learning are often stressful for educators and parents. The information age has the potential for relieving some of the chronological-age and instructional-time restrictions that have had a hold on education for many decades, maybe even for centuries. The new technological advances, made affordable, could change the face of education to one that is user-friendly for educators, students, and parents.

This essay was submitted by Emily Lemming, principal of St. Gabriel Catholic School, Connersville, Indiana.

The good news that enrollment in Catholic schools has increased for the fourth year gives me hope for the future. The fact that nearly as many schools opened as were closed speaks volumes. For those of us who have watched in dismay the number of Catholic schools dwindle, this encouraging trend seems to signify an answered prayer.

While working in Catholic schools for the past 25 years, I have observed educational priorities shift, sometimes dramatically. The one constant has been that parents still want and demand the best for their children. But today's world, with all of the demands it makes on parents and children, makes a meaningful family life increasingly difficult—some would even say impossible.

Accordingly, Catholic schools are called upon to become a type of family for our students. Recognizing that a full-time student spends nearly seven hours each day in school makes it clear that our Catholic schools and the values and stability that they offer are often the most important influences in many of our children's lives.

My grandson arrives at extended care at 7:30 each morning, attends kindergarten, and remains at the school, again in extended care, until 5:30 p.m. School is his world for 10 hours a day. The faculty and staff of a Christ-centered school must be committed to approaching each new day with enthusiasm, support, and concern for each person. My grandson, and all of the children enrolled in Catholic schools, has placed a significant part of his life into the loving hands of teachers who, like Christ, beckon, "Let the little children come to me."

This essay was submitted by Adele Meister, principal, Our Lady of Lourdes School, Great Falls, Montana.

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CATHOLIC EDUCATION VERSUS SHADOW CATHOLIC EDUCATION

In his book *Future Shock,* Alvin Toffler noted that we are all necessarily limited by our individual life experiences. *Limited* implies a deficit or lack, so I prefer to think that we are all formed and shaped by our experiences. I am limited by my participation in Catholic education as a student and as a worker. I attended four schools in the Galveston/Houston diocese. My experiences as a student at St. Theresa Elementary School, St. Thomas High School, St. Mary's Seminary, and the University of St. Thomas have influenced me. I have worked as a principal at St. Thomas Aquinas and Good Shepherd Catholic schools in the Diocese of Dallas. While I consider my experiences to have had considerable positive effect on me, they do, as Toffler noted, color, shade, limit, and define me and my views. When asked to think of the future of Catholic education, I am haunted by the vision of authentic Catholic education cloaked by "shadow Catholic education."

Shadow, used in this context, has absolutely nothing to do with the comic book, the film, or the actor Alec Baldwin. It refers to definitions, according to the tenth edition of *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary,* that include: "a shaded or darker portion of a picture"; "an imitation of something"; "a reflected image"; and "a source of gloom or unhappiness." The shadow in shadow Catholic education has these dark, negative, unreal connotations.

This particular manner of viewing Catholicism is not mine alone. I owe my favorite homilist for introducing me to his recurring theme of "Church" versus "Shadow Church." He contends that while the Roman Catholic Church is, indeed, the extension and reflection of Christ's presence among us, there are aspects to the Church that are not valid extensions or reflections. He recognizes the humanity of the institutional Church and the error that humanity brings. He notes that the Church ofttimes has made (is making) decisions and has taken actions that are not authentic representations of Jesus and his love.

An example of unauthentic, or shadow, Church events or actions could be the Church's official response to Galileo and his work. Excommunication was the price to be paid for what was considered heretical thinking. After the passage of only a few centuries, the error was corrected. Another example could be the Crusades. Politically motivated, the Crusades led to carnage in the name of faith that few would support today. Finally, while considered a "holy war" at the time, the Spanish Inquisition may be one

epoch in Church history that we do not refer to with a great deal of pride. Even in light of these high-profile examples, the actions of the authentic Church help to continue Christ's loving message of salvation.

It is important to stress that the authentic Church and the shadow Church coexist and that it is difficult, at times, to distinguish between the two. The very early work of missionaries in South and Central America and Mexico illustrates the point clearly. Many individuals were motivated by compassion and love. Their work led to salvation for indigenous people. This must be juxtaposed with the politically and personally motivated work of other missionaries that led to the death of many of the native peoples. The same dichotomy—authentic versus shadow—can be applied to Catholic education. At both the campus and the institutional levels, there are elements of shadow that cloud the future of Catholic education.

An egalitarian approach has been a hallmark of Catholic education. Catholic schools have opened their doors and hearts to all students. I remember a student in my elementary school class who, by current standards, should have been served in a special education classroom in a public school. Louis stayed with us through eighth grade and then took advantage of the special programs offered in the public system. This memory of mine is complemented by those efforts today toward inclusion of special needs students in our classrooms—a difficult, yet very Catholic task to complete.

Juxtaposed with this task are some shadow elements. Catholic schools that structure a reduction of student enrollment between grades and use that as a tool to "cull the herd" are shadow makers. I know that I'll get new students from those schools for first-grade enrollment. Their 88 kindergarten students must be moved into three sections of first grade, for a total first-grade enrollment of 75. The 13 "least desirable" students will not be invited back for first grade, and they will come to me looking for a continuation of their Catholic education. Certainly, there are instances when the services offered by a Catholic school are not appropriate for a particular student and the student is not asked to return. I, myself, have counseled parents to seek an alternative to my school for their child. An institutionalized process for deleting students from our ranks is, in my opinion, much more shadow than authentic.

We, as Catholics, see ourselves as part of a larger group. We refer to the "Body of Christ" and talk about our community. We emphasize our common values and beliefs and use those commonalities to bridge the differ-

ences between us. We support issues of economic and social justice and work publicly to promote equality. My mother's home parish contributes five percent of its weekly collection to Catholic charitable organizations. It is seen as part of the service we provide to and for each other. These values don't easily fit with decentralized funding structures, policies, and processes that allow financially distressed schools to continue to suffer and others to thrive. "Robin Hood" plans and centralized pay plans for Catholic education are not supported by the pastors of parishes with "comfortable" schools. A more narrow view comes into play, and the gap widens between the "have" and the "have-not" schools. With one school in the diocese rolling back tuition levels because there is money left over at the end of the school year, it is painful to know that another school does not even have sufficient numbers of in-adoption textbooks for its students. The shadow of selfishness and shortsightedness obscures the authentic Catholic value of taking care of each other.

In Catholic education we are all in a struggle. We struggle to find and retain the best teachers in a national climate of teacher shortage. We compete with public systems that offer higher salaries and better benefits. We struggle to offer our students the best instructional programs in an atmosphere where there is no shortage of top-level programs but there is a real shortage of top-level funding. Part-time school nurse positions shortchange student-health services. Lack of school counselors limits our ability to provide meaningful emotional-growth activities. We struggle for funding in an economic environment where all Church ministries struggle.

An excerpt from Franklin D. Roosevelt's second inaugural speech includes this sentence: "The measure of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little." While I am distressed by the shadows in Catholic education, I am hopeful that our progress, assessed by an FDR standard, will be great.

This essay was submitted by David M. Ross, principal of Good Shepherd Catholic School, Garland, Texas.

IDEAS OF A FUTURE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

1

Schools will exist while people need education
In the near future and beyond throughout this great nation.
What we examine today is an emerging worldview
Which reflects major changes in our point of view.

2

A Catholic school of the 21st century
Must live in the present with its eyes on eternity,
Must create a new vision of thinking and dreaming
While clinging to values that are worth redeeming.

3

More than ever, the school will shine like a beacon;
The Catholic identity must never, never weaken.
The school will offer more intense opportunities for spiritual formation
For faculty and staff who must be an inspiration.

4

Students must engage in active participation,
In exploring and communication while emphasizing cooperation.
They must improve relationships and reduce isolation
And accept responsibility to fulfill expectations.

5

Students must develop their higher thinking skills,
Be committed to Christian values and educate the will.
They must interact more often with adults in community
And reach out in service wherever the opportunity.

6

Catholic schools must soar in the right direction,
Not follow blindly without much reflection.
They must construct a future that offers alternatives
By shaping the present and being innovative.

7

These schools will enhance the quality of life
So children and adults will live without strife.
Some will choose paths based only on technology;
Others will sustain life and protect earth's ecology.

8

The schools' population will be more diversified,
And lifelong learning will be here to abide.
They will serve the needs of the local population—
And be a learning network in Catholic education.

9

Each person's total growth will become a real focus,
Requiring the study of a variety of approaches;
Health and well-being of body and mind,
With imagination and feelings and spirituality combined.

10

Cultural diversity will be greatly expanded,
And coping with change will be often demanded.
We will learn to use change to our greatest advantage
And to deal with ambiguities in this earthly pilgrimage.

11

Specialized training will go quickly out of date,
Allowing broader vision and flexibility to create.
Educators will be trained to reduce fragmentation,
To integrate disciplines without departmentalization.

12

Students will actively seek knowledge;
Learning how to learn will become a privilege.
No grouping or grading or tracking the scores,
No adherence to schedules while achieving the goals.

13

Communicating in languages other than their own,
Relating to others, students won't feel alone.
Experiencing the process of learning together,
They will challenge each other to make living better.

14

And so, these are ideas of a future school
That can break the mold and not follow the rule.
One thing is certain for 2000 and beyond:
With our dreams and plans we must respond.

This poem was submitted by Sister M. Joseph Barden, RSM, principal of Ascension Catholic School, Melbourne, Florida.

THE HEART OF EACH CATHOLIC SCHOOL REMAINS THE SAME

The look is stylish,
no longer in rows;
Classrooms with clusters,
computers, multimedia shows.

Teachers' new role is
as guide on the side;
Schools strive for cutting edge,
family friendliness, academic excellence, pride.

The new millennium approaches—
what do we see?
The dressing is different,
but on the core we all agree.

The heart of each Catholic school
remains the same:
Gospel based, a faith family, a community
in His name.

Enter to learn Christ;
leave to serve Christ.

This poem was submitted by Dolores R. Baumgarten, principal, St. Michael School, Orland Park, Illinois.

FUTURE SCHOOL

(To the cadence of the poem "Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?")

Future School, Future School,
Who will you serve?
Children with laptops doing worthwhile work
And ready for a learning curve.

Future School, Future School,
What will you teach?
Visions, values, Christ's laws of love
And global awareness as far as telecommunications will reach.

Future School, Future School,
Where will you be?
Could be underwater,
Out in space
Or at home with family.

Future School, Future School,
When will this take place?
Around the corner, in the next millennium
Through God's amazing grace.

Future School, Future School,
How can you succeed?
Through multilingual and multicultural teleconferencing,
Children will write, compute and read.

Future School, Future School,
Why has your story been told?
Because children cannot discover new ideas
Until teachers let go of the old.

This poem was submitted by Linda Armstrong, principal of The Nativity School, Rancho Santa Fe, California.

THE FAMILY AND THE FUTURE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

As I reflect on Catholic education in the future, I turn to the present and review our school philosophy. Most Catholic school philosophies, and ours is no exception, include the crucial statement, "The parents are the primary educators of their children." This is meant, of course, to be a positive statement giving recognition to the various Church documents that use the term "domestic church" to signify the home where parents and children embrace, communicate, and share in God's saving grace. The *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* from Vatican II stated that the Christian family is characterized by the spouses' mutual love and generous fruitfulness and by "the loving way in which all members of the family cooperate with each other" (1965, Art. 48).

The future of Catholic education may well depend upon the survival of the family. The family forms the earliest and most constant influence on a child's life. Christianity teaches us that parents have a solemn obligation to educate their children. Pope John Paul II's papal document concerning the Church's teachings on the family said that the parental right to educate is primary and irreplaceable. No educator would deny that parents have the right and responsibility to serve in the role as the primary educators of their children. After all, parents are the ones who gave them life, who will love them the longest, and who will know them the best and influence them the most.

The traditional family's duties must somehow be maintained. In today's world, this becomes a more difficult task with each passing year. We, as teachers and principals in our Catholic schools, must be aware that many children come to us in a family life cycle that has somehow gone astray, either through physical or psychological abandonment, divorce, or death. Single-parent homes, extended families, live-ins, latch-key kids, dual-career parents, financial crisis, loss of job, substance abuse, physical abuse in the home, alienation, and different role expectations may well be the norm for many of our children who come to Catholic schools.

If the family (the word *family* may need to be redefined to fit society today, since, as stated in *Kappan*, March 1995, only 50.8 percent of all youth live with both biological parents) and its educational role are to be saved, we must understand the essential function and hold fast to its preservation. We must appreciate the family as the basic societal unit that serves chiefly the fundamental needs of the children and serves the essential needs of society as well.

THE FAMILY AND THE FUTURE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

> To help our children move successfully into the 21st century we need to stop organizing our institutions and values around the notion that every family can . . . have one adult at work and another totally available at home. We have to adjust our economic programs, schools, work policies, expectations of family life, and moral reasoning to the realities of family diversity and the challenges of global transformation. (*Kappan*, 1995)

Knowing that there are changing realities in family life, what are we to do? This is the biggest challenge that we face in the future of Catholic education. As educators, our primary interest is focused on the students in our care and we must continue to maintain this as our primary focus. We as Catholic educators, however, must facilitate an understanding of, and an appreciation for, the family unit. As we review and revise our school philosophy, we must keep in mind the changing realities in today's families. The goals and objectives that we develop must be in light of the family perspective. As a result of our objectives, we need to develop strategies to ensure that we as a school community visibly support the needs of the family as well as of the individual child from that family.

As administrators in Catholic schools, we must offer staff development that will provide in-service for our faculty and staff, broaden the base of concern for the family, and raise the awareness of our staff on the family-life conditions of our students and on the implications, if any, for curriculum development and implementation.

Catholic schools have begun the process of identifying and meeting the changing needs of the family structure. Today, many preschool, day care, and extended day-care programs have begun. Schools have reviewed and revised homework policies, and parent involvement service-hour plans have been modified to meet the single parent's needs. Parent conferences and parent meetings are scheduled with the working parent in mind. Parent education classes and workshops have been offered that provide parent support in areas of religious formation, psychology and development of children, and the importance of instilling character education formation of the child at home as well as in school.

We must continue to explore concrete ways in which we as a school community can give witness to the concerns we have not only for our students but for their families whom we serve. A school can only benefit from any efforts that it makes to strengthen family life so that children will rightfully derive their Christian values from the home. It is timely that we

at the school level begin to address our support for family life to ensure the future of Catholic schools and the Catholic Church and for the mutual benefit of society.

This essay was submitted by Colleen Waugh, principal, Notre Dame School, Chico, California.

TIME FOR A REALITY CHECK

In recent years I have gone to many meetings focusing on financing our Catholic parish schools. For the most part, those in attendance all share pretty much the same story, i.e., "We are spending too much in our schools" or the twin line, "If only our people would tithe."

These simple sentences sum up a collective of emotions and reasoned opinions. I come home from meetings and tell my wife the wonders of what could be if all Catholic wage earners tithed like the Mormons. Oh, yes, the Mormons always are brought up in conversations as models of fiscal and related spiritual responsibility. I have often been caught up in the same game.

A few weeks ago I sat at my desk at school trying to come up with a miraculous way to pay a bill when there is no money to do so. I began doodling on a notepad. What really is happening to us that makes our school and church finances so worrisome so much of the time? Is it that we are wasteful? I know I'm not, and I feel sure that none of my colleagues whom I know so well are. Are Catholics really cheapskates? I found figures indicating that Catholic wage earners contribute an average of 1.7 percent of their income to the Church. That is pretty pitiful. Don't we have as strong a faith commitment as the Mormons, after all? When I look at how many kids tell me they can't go to Mass on Sunday because the family is "at the lake" or "too tired to get up," I must pause to wonder. Are our schools truly an unrealistic drain on the parishes? It is true that many parishes put 60 percent or more of their income into the operation of their elementary school? Most in our area put at least 40 percent into the operation. Tuition alone wouldn't do it. Should our schools be limited only to those who can fully pay? That thought would render the schools private and not parish institutions. It would surely tend to divide rather than unite God's people.

After confronting these questions, I was right back where I started. Tithing is the answer. But tithing for whom? Into my mind came a typical family of four in our region. The total family income is $35,000 per year. Let's presume that the parents have one child in the parish elementary school and one in a diocesan high school. Their children's tuition would amount to $5,250 a year. Uniforms, book fees, school supplies, and other costs normally assessed to parents are not included. The tuition amounts to 15 percent of their before-tax income, or approximately 18 percent of their after-tax income. Can these people contribute more to their parish? Not likely. They are caught in our government's interpretation of the tax laws,

which tells us that our full-time schools are really not an integral part of the religious education ministry of the Church. In reality, the tuition such a family is paying is a tithe far greater than that of the Mormons or of any faithful of any other religion of which I am aware. There goes my Mormon mode. Now, of course, this would not be the case for those with higher incomes. A $45,000-income family with the same situation to face would pay about 12 percent of their income. In essence, for every $10,000 one moves up the income ladder, the percentage of income required for tuition would decrease by approximately 2.4 percent. Still 6 percent of an $85,000 annual income would be required to send two children to Catholic school. The reality check says that tithing is *not* a reasonable way for families whose children are in elementary or high school to support their parish or the Church as a whole.

Is tithing, then, worthless? I think not. Let me propose another scenario. This time I will consider the case of a couple with a $35,000 per-year income and no children at home. They might be in their early fifties. If they contributed the national average of 1.5 percent of their before-tax income to their parish, their gift would be $525 per year. If the rate of giving went up 5 percent, the amount contributed would be $1,750. Now if they were Mormons, they would have put $3,500 in the collection each year. Just imagine what would happen if our Catholic people tithed at a 5 percent rate throughout the United States. I dare say that we would still have to be scrupulous about how principals spend money, but I suggest that not only our schools, but all the works of the Church, would be able to function well. Of course, this would presume that our people would be able to see a broader vision of the Church. The local parish would retain most of the funds, but a portion would be placed in a central diocesan fund. Money would be placed in long-term insured investment plans whose principal would earn interest sufficient to cover all sorts of emergency and development needs as well as to provide financial-assistance grants to parents in lower-income levels to help defray some of their tuition costs. This annuity concept is part of a just-underway plan in the Archdiocese of St. Louis. Both legs of the ladder must be in place, however: tithing and pooled investments.

TIME FOR A REALITY CHECK

We are not Mormons, nor would I want to be. We can learn from their example of stewardship, however.

This essay was submitted by Thomas McKenna, SFO, principal of St. Anthony of Padua School, High Ridge, Missouri.

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RESTRUCTURING CATHOLIC SCHOOLS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY: A COLLABORATIVE CHALLENGE

Catholic schools across America continue to prove that children and young adults excel in an environment that is carefully designed to be Christ-centered and child-centered in its mission. At the same time, evidence exists to prove that excellence in Catholic classrooms is achieved at a considerably lower per-pupil cost to the state and federal governments. In essence, Catholic schools provide a service to the country that should be preserved for future generations. How that service can be provided in the future must be given serious thought and planning by diocesan decision makers as America's calendar turns to the year 2000 and beyond.

It is wise to retain the unique qualities that are treasured in Catholic schools—Catholic identity, values, opportunities to serve, and community. It will be necessary to blend those components with technology, academic achievement, individual needs, and cooperative skills to prepare America's youth for the 21st century. This will add further thought for diocesan decision makers and planners.

The time has come for examining new ways to provide Catholic education to maximize the financial and human resources within existing parish and diocesan schools. Catholic school boards are challenged each year to fund bulging budgets while controlling tuition costs to families. Fund-raising and development programs are the exhaustive answers to balancing budgets and to providing the quality Catholic education that all desire.

Within every diocese in America, human resources abound. Diocesan and parish leaders have been encouraging lay leadership roles as the foundation for stewardship in this decade. Similarly, diocesan and parish leaders need to study and design restructured models for the Catholic schools in their trust. Collaboration is an effort worthy of consideration.

One collaborative approach focuses on the feasibility of various schools within a diocese having redefined populations. Based on location, size, structure, etc., one school within a diocese might be ideal for an early childhood center. A school in a neighboring parish might best serve a middle-school population because of the space for an expanding sports program. There might be a school that could serve a mixed population of students with special learning needs. By examining the strengths and weaknesses of each school site, sound decisions could be made that would provide each school a specific mission in the educational community while avoiding costly duplication of services.

RESTRUCTURING CATHOLIC SCHOOLS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY: A COLLABORATIVE CHALLENGE

What value can be attained from such restructuring within the Catholic schools of a diocese? That can best be answered by looking at what is expected of each school at the current time. Typically, an elementary school can have a population ranging from three-year-old preschoolers to eighth-graders. Such an expansive range requires considerable financial expenditures, from small-sized playground equipment to football fields, from Lego sets to dissecting kits. With the rising costs of educational material and equipment, it is no longer cost-effective for numerous Catholic schools in a city to try to provide for all ages. Through collaborative planning, restructuring the school populations will allow primary, intermediate, middle, and senior high levels to plan and finance educational programs that will place Catholic schools in a unique position to meet the individual and programmatic needs of their students. Investments in technology and the acquisition of certified professionals will be enhanced by focusing on the needs of specific populations.

In order to benefit from a collaborative approach, long-established mindsets must be replaced with visionary communities that are willing to take risks in their search for excellence in Catholic education for the coming years. Are our religious and lay leaders ready for the challenge?

This essay was submitted by Mary Anne Hipp, principal of Maria Immacolata School in Houma, Louisiana.

It is no longer effective to plan for the year. We need to assess the goals and aspirations of our school and plan for a three- to five-year period of time. As we begin our preparations, we need to be mindful of the question in the back of all our minds, "What will be required of us as we prepare to educate in the 21st century?" There are numerous suggestions and possibilities when considering this concern. In an attempt to begin somewhere significant, to arrive at some place of importance, and to make a real contribution, let us think about the following statement, written to emphasize the action that will take more than a few years to practice and believe in before it becomes part of us as persons: We begin our preparations for the new millennium by invoking Christ into our lives and proposing actions and attitudes for all of us to live by.

Where will our Catholic-school investments of time and money be made in the future? Will our technology be used as a tool to strengthen our Christ-centered, curriculum-driven programs? How many other amazing educational tools will come along and assist us in our awesome responsibilities of educating the young? There are so many possibilities, opportunities for growth, and participatory activities for our young minds (and older ones) to be exposed to. How can we not be excited? How can we not continue to explore the many possibilities of learning and reaching out to children of all levels?

There is so much to be excited about in educating our children in Catholic schools as we approach the 21st century. Our computerized instruction and all of the fascination with the Internet; math and science labs; literature-rich and information-based reading and learning programs that help students become lifelong learners; students participating in cooperative learning strategies and student government, writing and editing their own yearbooks, contributing to student-faculty discipline committees; available choirs and drama clubs; continued science and mathematical explorations; relevant and participatory learning units; parental and board involvement; and improved and continued art, music, and physical education programs teach our children the whys and ways of the world. If this excitement is based on reality, it is balanced with some anxiety and concern. No one school, be it private, public, or denominational, has *the* secure plan for the future. The question is, "How can we provide an educational environment whereby our students are exposed to the tools of learning that will help them ask questions, evaluate current solutions, and want to remain involved in the active service of creating a better world for others?" As people in-

volved in Catholic schools, where do we find the balance? Where do our traditions guide us? What have our foreparents taught us?

Love and commitment to Christ take the uncertainty out of today's challenges. It is our personal relationship with the living Christ that makes our future so sure. Jesus is, was, and will be always the one who teaches us about transcending the pain, anxiety, poverty, discomfort, death, and other challenges that we face and that our children will eventually come to know. It is this assurance that we want to expose our students to and make readily available to them today. Hope in a Creator who has taken us from then to now and forever is an investment that has been tried-and-true. The spiritual formation among our families, faculty, and students needs to be ongoing, relevant, and living. The heart of our Catholic schools is like the heart of a family. It is at the center of both institutions and finds its identity in the beliefs and practices of its members.

There is plenty of excitement in education today. We want to consider with our families, faculties, and boards those avenues that will readily strengthen our children's ability to think, problem-solve, participate, cooperate, allow for differences. For this to be possible, our schools need to be about the good news of Jesus Christ, first and foremost. Christ cares about all of us and our educational concerns. Christ reaches out to human needs and accepts people where they are. There is no technological tool involved. There is hope, which is believing in the One who is for us today, was there for our ancestors, and will be there forever.

As we explore our visions for educating the young in this new year, we want to provide an educational environment where children and adults come together to grow in love and understanding, share life's burdens, and find new strength, vitality, and dimensions for living in the new millennium.

This essay was submitted by Deborah McCloskey, principal, St. Juliana School, Chicago, Illinois.

AN INVITATION TO THE READER

Now that you have completed reading this book, please reflect on what you have read here, what you have read in other sources, your experiences, and your predictions. I encourage you to share the details of some exciting program that is happening in your school that might be replicated in other schools. Please share your thoughts on the future of American Catholic elementary/middle schools for the 21st century with your colleagues in Catholic school education.

You may wish to discuss the school in general or a particular aspect of the 21st-century Catholic elementary/middle school. Please limit your essay to no more than 2,000 words.

Send your essay on disk (if you have WordPerfect 5.1 or Microsoft Word) to:

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